

USAID West Bank and Gaza Humanitarian Assistance Contingency Plan February 2003

Introduction

The basic premise of the USAID West Bank and Gaza Humanitarian Assistance Contingency Plan is the onset of a US-led war with Iraq. It is anticipated that extremely tight control over Palestinian movements through increased curfews and closures to prevent retaliation against Israeli civilians will be imposed.

The USAID/West Bank & Gaza Mission has outlined a Humanitarian Assistance Contingency Plan that identifies assumptions, preparations to respond to emergency and humanitarian needs, organizational capabilities, and constraints in providing humanitarian assistance. This plan will set a functional stage for USAID programming and emphasizes the need for continuing policy dialogue and support. This Contingency Plan is based on discussions and inputs from USAID, United Nations (UN) humanitarian agencies, the donor community, and implementing partners.

The fundamental philosophy of this Contingency Plan is that U.S. foreign assistance would focus its efforts to target basic human needs¹ of refugee and non-refugee populations, with special focus on vulnerable and at-risk populations.² USAID has several mechanisms in place which will allow it to respond, through implementing partners, immediately and effectively to increasing humanitarian needs.

Although it remains difficult to determine the duration of increased closures and curfews, for the purposes of program planning, an initial time period of three months will be used.

Background

For purposes of clarifying USAID's humanitarian response, the crisis caused by the curfew and closure regime has been divided into two types: 1) *social*, characterized by decline in food security for the most vulnerable populations such as the elderly, women-headed households, and disabled, decline in access to critical health services, loss of jobs and income, decline in access to clean water and removal of solid waste; closure of schools, increasing anger and frustration, exhaustion of coping mechanisms. 2) *economic*, characterized by a sharp increase in unemployment, decline in disposable incomes, disruption of flows of goods and services into and within the West Bank and Gaza, past withholding of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and subsequent institutional disruption, decline in investment into the West Bank and Gaza, and capital flight. The economic crisis, in part, is being addressed through USAID's emergency programs designed to immediately generate jobs, income, and investment, but is not considered in this Contingency Plan.

¹ Health, Food, Shelter, Water, Infrastructure

² Special hardship cases such as women, children, single female headed households, disabled, and the elderly, and unemployed workers, or the families of unskilled daily workers who have no or limited access to any job opportunities.

In discussions with UN Agencies, international organizations and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and from documents from other humanitarian organizations, it is clear that the humanitarian community, particularly following Operation Defensive Shield and the military incursions of last spring, has been operating under a sustained emergency scenario. Thus, the organizations have been improving their capacity to provide humanitarian assistance despite the closures and curfews, the delays through checkpoints, the restrictions on Palestinians including staff permits, the financial crisis facing the Palestinian Authority (PA), and strong military presence throughout the West Bank and Gaza . These organizations have devised processes and systems of overcoming the serious difficulties in accessing the Palestinian civilian population through developing relationships with local Israeli Defense Force (IDF) counterparts, transferring items between vehicles at each side of checkpoints and crossing by foot, increasing international staff to accompany national staff in critical areas, and working together to achieve goals. USAID has provided critical support to its implementing partners in devising these systems and reaching targeted populations.

USAID and other members of the humanitarian community have made a number of assumptions (see Attachment I) regarding actions that may result in increased vulnerability of affected populations and prohibit/restrict provision of consistent and timely humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations. These assumptions are based on several factors including a comparison with conditions imposed upon the Palestinians during the 1991 Gulf War, conditions imposed during the March-April 2002 incursions, and current political, economic, and social conditions. The assumptions and estimated impacts are an attempt to cover all possible emergency and humanitarian needs that may arise and to prepare and coordinate as much as possible. It is recognized that some assumptions and estimated impacts are less likely to happen than others. It is understood that targeting and coordination among members of the community will become increasingly critical toward providing humanitarian assistance.

While the impacts of increased and prolonged closures on the Palestinians may not be seen immediately in large part because of the efforts of the donors and implementing agencies in reaching vulnerable populations, the numbers of at-risk populations are growing. The extent of the social crisis will depend on the duration of the increased closures and curfews for more people. Nevertheless, it remains critical to prepare for immediate emergency needs as well as to prevent further degradation of the social conditions of affected Palestinian populations.

Responses by the Humanitarian Community

While no organization supports the current situation, all believe they will be able to continue to operate under even more severe closures and prolonged curfew periods, albeit with greater difficulty. Despite a tighter clampdown on population movements, the Government of Israel (GoI) has stated that they will allow continued provision of humanitarian assistance. Indeed, several organizations have stated that the GoI has improved its willingness to work with humanitarian assistance organizations in accessing

vulnerable populations. Thus, in general, most preparations for an imminent war focus on the following:

- 1) Safety and security of personnel, particularly during curfew periods.
- 2) Improving and refining capabilities to access populations. Communications failures and shutdown appear to be expected by most organizations. Preparations include acquiring satellite communications for key offices or additional mobile telephone cards (with the assumption that the Palestinian mobile phone system will be shut down), and ensuring adequate fuel for generators and vehicles.
- 3) Limited stockpiling and pre-positioning in decentralized areas. Apparently, it is often easier to move items from Jerusalem to outer-lying areas than to move pre-positioned items in remote areas to other remote areas. Warehouse capacity is too limited to accommodate large stockpiles and adequate protection of stockpiled or pre-positioned items is not deemed feasible. Thus setting up two or three offices in the West Bank and one or two in Gaza, seem to be the most practical for our implementing partners.

Issues/Concerns Affecting Humanitarian Assistance

Despite the systems set up to provide humanitarian assistance, there remain serious issues regarding consistent and timely access to targeted populations. Arrangements made by many of the organizations are largely informal and subject to change with no forewarning, often right at the checkpoint. Long delays and intricate forms of getting people and goods through checkpoints strongly affect the timely provision of goods and services. Most organizations believe that many IDF soldiers at checkpoints lack a clear understanding of the nature of humanitarian assistance and how the UN, ICRC, and NGOs work. Finally, the safety and security of all personnel traveling during curfew, whether in a vehicle or on foot, remains of great concern to the humanitarian community.

USAID/WBG Response and Preparations

The two overarching goals of USAID under this Contingency Plan are: 1) Provision of humanitarian assistance in a timely and consistent fashion, and 2) Promotion of internationally accepted standards in provision of goods and services. USAID believes it critical that implementing agencies gain access to villages and communities and for the people of these communities to be able to access goods and services on a regular basis. USAID's humanitarian assistance is intended to both respond to critical needs and to prevent further deterioration of basic humanitarian conditions regarding health, water, sanitation, shelter, and food security. USAID is in agreement with the international humanitarian community that promotion of international standards and international humanitarian law are critical features of all humanitarian assistance programs. USAID will respond and prepare in two primary ways: policy/coordination and programmatic support.

Policy and Coordination Support

1) Managing Curfews and Closures

USAID can support the persistence of the humanitarian community in getting around closures, delays at checkpoints, restrictions on Palestinian staff, etc, through working with the Israeli Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) in

“managing” curfews and closures. Given that increased closures and curfews will most likely occur, affecting greater numbers of Palestinians, it will be vital to work with the Israelis in developing a systematic approach to provision of humanitarian assistance during curfew periods and closures that will ensure consistent and timely provision of humanitarian goods and services. We must also work to ensure that the affected populations will be given correct and timely information regarding curfew periods and will have consistent access to services. USAID can provide support through its bilateral contacts and agreements, its participation on the Task Force for Project Implementation (TFPI), as well as working closely with the US Embassy, the Consulate General, and through the several other task forces set up to work on policy and implementation issues.

2) Promoting international standards of humanitarian assistance.

At a presentation given to Ross Mountain of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) last October, Health Inforum noted that 100% of all tankers providing emergency water to villages *failed to meet any acceptable standards for water delivery*. USAID can play a strong role in educating the IDF and COGAT on and promoting international standards of humanitarian assistance. It is critical that an international NGO be able to cross checkpoints everyday, if necessary, to provide adequate assistance. Moreover, it is important to convey that provision of humanitarian assistance does not mean that anything is better than nothing, but that under all circumstances, internationally or generally accepted standards must be considered before, during, and after implementation.

3) Task Force on Project Implementation (TFPI)

USAID is the current chair. Additional members are the European Union (EU), UN Special Coordinator’s Office (UNSCO), and the World Bank. The TFPI works closely with the COGAT. The Task Force works out issues regarding program implementation including permits for Palestinians staff, protection of staff, policies regarding international staff and travel from the West Bank and Gaza into Israel. TFPI will be useful in bringing to the table additional problems relating to contingency planning and response and provision of humanitarian assistance. USAID Liaisons: Larry Garber, Rick Scott, Melanie Mason.

4) Humanitarian & Emergency Policy Group (HEPG)

HEPG functions to develop and update a coherent donor strategy for addressing the current emergency, and to consider relevant policy options that donors might wish to pursue. Members include officials from the EU, USAID, US Consulate General, World Bank, UNSCO, and OCHA. The HEPG will take a stronger role toward tracking the Bertini Commitments; the commitments made by the GoI during the visit by the UN Secretary-General’s Personal Humanitarian Envoy, Ms. Catherine Bertini. The HEPG reports to the members of the LACC and is chaired by the EU. USAID Liaisons: Bill Hammink and Sherry Carlin.

5) UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA)

UNRWA has the overall coordination mandate for Palestinian refugees, totaling approximately 1,505,509³ (or 47%) of the total Palestinian population (3,200,000) living in the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA will continue to chair the Area Operational Task Forces in Gaza and the West Bank and will participate in a range of other coordination efforts. UNRWA has existing and functional field coordination offices that serve as the eyes and ears of refugee sectoral and area-based needs. These nine offices are located in Gaza City, Rafah, E. Jerusalem, Jericho, Nablus, Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Jenin and fielded by both expatriate and national staff.

6) UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

OCHA will assist UNSCO and others in coordinating humanitarian assistance at the policy level for refugee and non-refugee populations. OCHA will also play an instrumental role in tracking the Bertini Commitments through collecting information on conditions, incidents of violations, and presenting reports to the HEPG. OCHA is in the process of setting up five field offices; the primary objective is to obtain first-hand information in a systematic and methodologically standard fashion. A field office in Ramallah is the first priority for OCHA, the other locations will follow.

7) Movement of Palestinian staff.

Restrictions placed on Palestinian staff of international agencies and organizations already cause hardship and delays in providing humanitarian assistance. The one assumption that USAID cannot overcome will be if the UN and ICRC evacuates its international staff. Should this occur, then most all other international organizations will evacuate international staff. Because of current movement restrictions on Palestinian staff, humanitarian assistance programs may come to a virtual standstill. USAID will continue to advocate greater freedom of movement for Palestinian relief workers in providing critical needs—with or without international staff.

8) Other Donors

USAID coordinates with other donors through its participation on several task forces designed to address the increasing humanitarian needs of the Palestinians due to closures, curfew, and other policy directives. Programmatic coordination with the other donors will need to intensify, particularly with the EU and UN Agencies, in targeting assistance during a severe closure and curfew regime.

9) The Palestinian Authority (PA)

The PA is severely undermined as the crisis continues. USAID believes it is important to not only improve upon but to utilize existing capacities of the relevant Ministries in planning, coordination, and in providing humanitarian assistance.

Programmatic Support

USAID will focus on continuing to provide humanitarian assistance in health, nutrition, food, and clean water sectors for targeted populations. While increased closures and curfews will affect current programs to a significant degree, USAID has the following

³ West Bank: 626,532 refugees and Gaza: 878,977 refugees

programs and structures in place that can be used to help monitor conditions on the ground and increase assistance if needed:

1. CARE- Emergency Medical Assistance Program (EMAP)

a) Sentinel Survey System (SSS) - SSS collects biweekly data on health conditions, resulting in a monthly report, enabling USAID to consistently monitor health needs and target humanitarian interventions.

b) Procurement of emergency pharmaceuticals to the MoH. CARE is proposing to expand this program to include a request from the MoH for additional antibiotics. CARE has developed a strong procurement and distribution system for pharmaceuticals and has been working on a system to improve MoH movement of pharmaceuticals while maintaining control. CARE is not proposing a major stockpiling because of limited warehouse capacity, but an expansion to accommodate emerging critical needs.

c) Sub-grants program- CARE has issued an RFA for local organizations, due to close January 16, for provision of emergency health services through a sub-grant program. The current sub-grant program has awarded nine grants, of which the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) is the largest recipient. The PRCS has been very successful in accessing affected populations; it has support from ICRC as well.

2. Save the Children Federation/US (SCF/US)

a) Psychosocial Support Program- during the next month, SCF will have completed training of up to 1500 school teachers and counselors for their Classroom Based Intervention (CBI) program. CBI can still be conducted when schools are closed, allowing children some release/play time (and parents a respite from their children as well), and as a means of identifying more severe cases. SCF intends to establish a hotline for severe cases that newly trained teachers cannot treat.

b) Through SCF's grant with the Community Services Program, SCF has established a network of communications throughout villages and communities that can monitor and identify humanitarian needs. This network can assist other organizations in distributing items in villages and communities.

3. IBM- MARAM

a) Since the spring incursions of 2002, MARAM has worked to decentralize critical health services, particularly for women. MARAM has expanded its program to provide birthing and post-natal services in health clinics and other centers that lacked capacity to provide these services. Maternity and home-delivery kits have been distributed and training is on-going. In addition, behavior change and communication campaigns have been established to support families unable to reach health clinics during curfews.

b) Procurement of necessary medical equipment, supplies, and pharmaceuticals currently supports and will continue to support targeted health facilities.

4. World Food Program (WFP)

USAID currently has a grant with WFP providing logistical support to WFP's food aid programs. The time period of the grant has recently been extended through June 2003. WFP is setting up three sub-offices in the West Bank and Gaza, which will include

international staff. WFP is currently providing assistance to 542,000 of the most vulnerable people in the West Bank and Gaza.

5. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

USAID's grant supporting ICRC's voucher program has been extended through June 2003. ICRC is usually able to move into curfew areas and works closely with COGAT in allowing access. ICRC coordinates with the WFP in the distribution of food and in the voucher program.

6. World Health Organization (WHO) Health Inforum

Health Inforum has evolved into a useful and very much needed center for collection and dissemination of health information. Health Inforum facilitates distribution of goods through closed areas by acting as a main point of contact for organizations needing help from international organizations to get through checkpoints and closures. Should Health Inforum require additional staff to accommodate increased calls for assistance in facilitating distribution of items, it expects to have many volunteers, as it did during the incursions last spring.

7. CDM- Emergency Water Operations Center (EWOC)

EWOC has been pre-positioning pipes, pumps and other items necessary to repair broken village water systems. EWOC has set up mechanisms with CARE, SCF, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA) to immediately begin provision of emergency water through tankers to targeting areas, if necessary.

8. ARD- Rafeed

Rafeed is a sub-grant program designed to support local NGOs in providing non-health humanitarian assistance. Assistance includes agriculture support and emergency employment. Rafeed is currently identifying several key NGOs with the capacity to provide additional emergency assistance.

Further Considerations

While many organizations have been able to get through checkpoints to implement their programs, there remain considerable delays and problems. The curfew and closure regime in place since last spring has resulted in increasingly deteriorating social conditions of Palestinians. Many organizations fear that a severe closure regime, even for a short duration, will result in a significant increase in the number of Palestinians requiring humanitarian assistance. There is also fear that this may lead to increased violence, whether due to large numbers of people ignoring curfew and pouring out to the streets and subsequent IDF reaction, as seen last spring, or due to increased activity by Palestinian groups against Israelis.

Clearances:

SCarlin: _____

Date: _____

BHammink: _____

Date: _____

LGarber: _____

Date: _____